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ABSTRACT

This profile in outline form of the English language teaching situation in Canada discusses the role of English within Canadian society and within the educational systems in the provinces. The discussion takes place within the context of the Official Languages Act of 1969, which declared English and French official languages for all government purposes and which accorded them equal status under the law. English as a medium of instruction at all levels of education is discussed with respect to Quebec and to the other provinces. The composition of the teaching cadre at all levels is dealt with, as well as teaching materials, English outside the educational system, and British and American support for English instruction. A list of documents useful for further reference is provided. A supplementary outline of the current status of literary education and of the literary scene in general accompanies the profile. (AMH)

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ENGLISH TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

Country: CANADA July 1978

1. Role of English

1.1 The English and French languages were made the official languages of Canada when the Government of Canada passed the Official Languages Act in 1969. That Act declares that the English and French languages are the official languages of Canada for all purposes of the Government of Canada, and that they possess and enjoy equality of status under the law.

1.2 At the time of the 1971 Census of Canada, it was estimated that the mother tongue of 13 million Canadians (ie 60% of the population) was English: the mother tongue of 5.8 million Canadians (ie 27% of the population) was French. The mother tongue of the remaining 2.7 million Canadians (ie 13% of the population) was one of more than 20 other languages. 1.7 million Canadians (ie 8% of the population) lived in Provinces where, in so far as the official languages were concerned, they were in a minority. There were 789,185 Canadians whose mother tongue was English living in the Province of Quebec, and 926,400 Canadians whose mother tongue was French living in Provinces other than Quebec (mainly in New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island).

1.3 The Official Languages policy of the Government of Canada recognises that there are many languages spoken in Canada but that there are two predominant language groups to which every Canadian, except the 1.5% of the population who speak neither English nor French, belongs, regardless of ethnic origin or mother tongue.

1.4 The main principles of the Official Languages Act are:

a. Every citizen in his or her private capacity has the right to speak any language.

b. English and French are the only official languages.

c. The English and French languages are a fundamental expression of the Canadian heritage, and public policies should preserve and develop this heritage.

d. Canadians have a right to have their children educated in the official language of their choice.

e. Canadians should be able to communicate with, and to obtain service from, the Federal institutions of Government in the official language of their choice (in current jargon, this is called institutional bilingualism).

f. The two official language groups should participate equitably in the Federal institutions of Government.

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2. English within the Educational System

2.1 Education in Canada is a Provincial and not a Federal responsibility. There are 12 Departments of Education in the Canadian Provinces and Territories. Although those Departments have much in common, their policies and practices are different.

2.2 Outside of Quebec

2.2.1 With the exception of French-medium instruction for French-speaking minorities and the use of Indian and Native languages (in the North and West), English is the medium of instruction throughout the educational system.

2.2.2 With the exception of the Universities of Moncton (French-medium), Laurentian and Ottawa (both bilingual), all Universities and Community Colleges outside of Quebec are English-medium institutions.

2.2.3 In urban areas of Canada, there are many Canadians, particularly recent immigrants, who speak neither English nor French as their monther-tongue. The Boards of Education in Toronto and Vancouver, for example, currently estimate that within their jurisdictions 55% and 49% respectively of the children going to school do not speak English as their mother-tongue. ESL programmes for children and adults are now well-established throughout the educational system in urban areas. Special funding for such programmes is provided by Provincial, Federal and metropolitan authorities. Ontario and British Colombia (and Quebec) have active TESL Associations, and a National TESL Association for Canada will almost certainly be founded this year.

2.2.4 The Michigan Test of English is used extensively by Universities and other post-Secondary institutions as a means of assessing the standard of English of students who have learnt English as a second language.

2.3 In Quebec

2.3.1 Provincial Bills 22 (1974) and 101 (1977) made French the only official language in Quebec. The detailed and complicated provisions of Bill 101, "Charter of the French Language", were drafted by the Parti Quebecois with the intention of making French the predominant language of the Province of Quebec in all areas of public life and activity. Those provisions affect the conduct of business; the education of immigrant children; the language of advertisements and public signs and the language of the courts. The Preamble to Bill 101 states that the Bill is intended to make French the language of Government and the Law, as well as the normal and everyday language of work, instruction and communication. The Bill provided for an office De La Langue Francaise, which has now been established, to define the regulations for the interpretation of the new language legislation.

2.3.2 This is not the place for an essay on the relationship between language and politics, or language and nationalism, in Quebec or Canada. It may, however, be worth repeating in the context of the profile that language is an extremely sensitive and complicated issue in Quebec. There is the passionate feeling

of many French speakers that their language and culture are being submerged: there is also the conflicting feeling among non-native speakers of French (and some French speakers too) that English is the main language of the North American continent, and that those who do not have a command of it are at a disadvantage.

2.3.3 The present Provincial Government in Quebec, like its liberal predecessor, is officially committed to a policy of promoting and improving the teaching and use of French, and a policy of promoting the teaching of English as a Second (in or near Montreal) or foreign (outside of Montreal) language.

The opposition of the pro-French lobbies and the influential Teacher's union in Quebec has so far prevented the Parti Québecois from its promised reconsideration of the Department of Education's policies and programmes for the teaching of English. The amount of time that High Schools were required by the Department of Education to spend teaching English each week has been reduced from 200 to 150 minutes. French language and French studies are considered more important core subjects.

2.3.4 Approximately 83% of the children going to school in Quebec are receiving a French-medium education. The remaining 17%, who are being educated in English, are mainly going to school in Montreal and the Eastern Townships. The Government of Quebec expects the proportion of children going to French-medium schools to increase from 83% to 87%, as a result of the provisions of Bill 101.

2.3.5 There are 7 Universities in Quebec: 3 are English-medium and 4 are French-medium. All but 4 or 5 Quebec's 60 odd Community Colleges are French-medium.

2.3.6 The teaching of French is mandatory from Grade 1 (Primary 1) in the English-medium sector: in the French-medium sector, the teaching of English is required from Grade 5 onwards (it has been introduced at an earlier stage in some areas). The teaching of English is mandatory throughout the Secondary School system. A recent study commissioned by the Council for Ministers of Education has confirmed that Quebec has done more than the other Provinces to provide programmes for the teaching of the minority official language.

2.3.7 The TESL Centres at the Universities of Concordia and Laval are mainly responsible for postgraduate and in-service ELT training in Quebec. Many of the Curriculum Advisers for English, who work at the regional level, have been, or will be, trained in Britain.

3. Teaching Cadre

Although there are more teachers than there are teaching jobs in Canada, there is a lack of qualified and experienced ELT staff in all Provinces. With the exception of Concordia University and the University of British Columbia, there are no Canadian Universities that offer practical, ELT courses at the postgraduate level. The TESL Associations in Ontario and British Columbia arrange annual, in-service courses in conjunction with their Departments of Education. Many Canadian teachers of ELT are originally from Britain.

4. Materials support

4.1 American and Canadian teaching materials are widely used throughout Canada. British materials are known, and are used in some places. Despite the common objection that British materials are too English in vocabulary and accent to be used without modification in Canada, there is much interest in new courses and supplementary materials from Britain.

4.2 The British Council would be grateful if visiting ELT specialists would report on the opportunities for, and potential Canadian interest in, British materials. The information obtained will be passed on to British publishers.

5. English outside the Educational System

5.1 There are private, commercial schools throughout Canada that teach English.

5.2 A number of the Departments of the Federal Government of Canada have an interest in ELT:

5.2.1 The Department of Employment and Immigration provides funds so that immigrants may be taught English after their arrival in Canada. The main programme is for adult workers who do not have sufficient English to take up employment. Community Colleges throughout Canada are contracted by the Department of Employment and Immigration to provide short courses to those workers.

5.2.2 The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs provides funds for programmes planned for Native peoples.

5.2.3 The Language Programmes Branch of the Department of the Secretary of State funds a variety of programmes that are intended to provide the opportunity for members of the majority official language group in each Province or Territory to acquire a knowledge of the second official language. Federal contributions are made in the form of partial reimbursement for language programmes developed and administered by the Provinces. The cost of the current programmes is approximately $80 million a year.

5.3 The Public Service Commission is the Department of Federal Government that is most involved in language training in Canada.

5.3.1 The Language Training Branch of the Public Service Commission in Ottawa is responsible for teaching both of the official languages to Federal civil servants. Approximately 90% of the staff of the Language Training Branch are concerned with the teaching of French: the remaining 10% are concerned with teaching English, mainly to Francophone civil servants. Since the English Programme comprises only about one-tenth of the Language Training Branch, it is a compact organisation, which is out of the public limelight. It includes some 200 teachers and specialists, several schools and its own evaluation and programme development units.

5.3.2 The English Programme Development Unit is staffed by a team of 7 curriculum writers. The Unit's main job is to write and publish ESL materials in North American English. The Unit also trains teachers in the use of materials. The Unit is at present developing its line of materials with more functionally orientated, job-related materials.

5.3.3 The implementation of the Official Languages Act is supervised on behalf of Parliament by a Commissioner for Official Languages.

6. British Support for the Teaching of English

Although the British Council does not have any specialist ELT staff posted in Canada, the Ottawa office has a special interest in (1) ELT exchanges between Britain and Canada (2) keeping in touch with those working in the Canadian, ELT field (3) promoting Britain's ELT expertise and materials.

Britain is recognised in Canada as a leader in the ESL field, and there is much interest both in and outside of Quebec in British expertise and materials.

The British Council office in Ottawa can provide detailed information on request about institutions and individuals concerned with ELT at all levels in all parts of Canada.

7. American Support for the Teaching of English

As Canada and the USA are neighbours, Canadians do not have to make an effort to keep in touch with ELT developments in America.

8. Current Research and Bibliography

Research is undertaken at Laval University, Quebec; Concordia University, Montreal; the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, and the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

The Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation in Toronto publishes "TESL Talk", which is a useful quarterly periodical for ELT teachers.

The publications listed below provide useful information about language policies and programmes:

8.1 "A National Understanding" (Statement of the Government of Canada on the official languages policy), 1977. Printing and Publishing, Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, K1A OS9.

8.2 "Official Languages Programmes". Language Programmes Branch, Department of the Secretary of State, Ottawa, K1A OM5.

8.3 "Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism."

Book 1. The Official Languages. October 1967.

Book 2. Education. May 1968.

8.4 Bill 101 "Charter of the French Language". Quebec 1977. Other information about Canadian, ELT programmes may be obtained from Provincial Departments of Education, or from the School Boards (eg the Toronto and Vancouver Boards of Education).

ENGLISH - TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE: CANADA

LITERATURE ANNEX

1. Status of Literature

In all Provinces except Quebec, English Literature is regarded as either the native, or the kindred, Literature. In Quebec, English Literature is a foreign Literature, which is studied as such, or for examples of good writing in the study of the English language.

Although there is much current emphasis on the promotion and teaching of Canadian Literature, it is a fact of life that there is no Canadian writing (in English) of much consequence before the twentieth century. The classics are the classics of English Literature.

2. Education

2.1 English-speaking children study English Literature at Primary and Secondary Schools.

2.2 'O' and 'A' level examinations are not taken in Canada. Each High School sets its own final examinations and follows curriculum guidelines, which are prescribed by the Provincial Departments of Education.

2.3 Most textbooks are American or Canadian in origin. The works of British writers, poets and dramatists are in frequent use in Canadian schools.

2.4 There are no figures available for the number of students who study English in Canada's numerous Universities and Colleges. The number is probably a high one.

2.5 To obtain an Honours Degree in Literature a Canadian student would have to cover much the same ground as a student studying in a British University. There is, however, much more emphasis (and a larger choice of courses) on modern, Canadian and American writing within Canadian Universities.

2.6 Books and texts are widely available in libraries and bookshops throughout Canada.

3. General

3.1 The Canadian Council of Teachers of English is primarily concerned with the teaching of Literature.